

Creating a Culture of Continuous Innovation

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The current health care environment is complex and undergoing a continual change; as a result, innovation must be inspired by and ignited within all members of a health care team. This article explores a creative leadership model for creating a culture of continuous innovation and encompasses nursing leadership perspectives in multiple practice environments.

The current health care environment is complex and undergoing continual change. As a complex adaptive system, health care is a living system with interrelated, interconnected, and interdependent parts.¹ A complex system requires nurse leaders to adopt frameworks to address these complexities and achieve high quality outcomes. Additional demands are placed on creating meaningful work for health care staff, all while reducing costs. The health care environment is also fluid and requires a culture of continuous innovation to succeed.

Nursing leaders must build a culture and facilitate innovation. In addition, an established culture influences what kind of leadership is possible. The cyclical relationship among culture, leadership, and innovation must be understood. Most integral to leadership is an acknowledgment that leadership must thrive at all levels of an organization.² Innovation cannot be achieved alone; it must be inspired and ignited within all members of a team, particularly in health care and within nursing leaders. Leaders are responsible for building a culture and influencing innovation by role modeling key individual- and system-level leadership concepts. The individual-level concepts of inspired leadership and resilience, and the

system-level concepts of transformational leadership, social capital, and change management are critical components for building a culture of innovation. Nurse leaders from multiple practice settings collaboratively designed a framework for innovation based on these core individual- and system-level concepts.

CREATING THE MODEL

Nurse leaders in academia, acute care, urgent care, system operations, and medical device technology first created individual conceptual models. These models represent their personal frame of reference using a variety of system- and individual-level leadership concepts. Next, the leaders collectively analyzed each individual model and its associated leadership concepts to reach a consensus on the development of 1 group-designed model. Together, in the spirit of leadership innovation, the Continuous Innovation Model (CIM) was developed (*Figure 1*). This model is formulated on the basis of the foundation of a bicycle. From the gears to the tires, all structural elements of a bicycle are essential for a smooth ride and forward movement. In the CIM, all parts hold irrefutable value to create a culture of continuous innovation. The model and associated concepts in the descriptions that follow represent the unique, diverse perspectives of nurse leaders in a variety of settings.

KEY POINTS

- Nurse leaders must adopt frameworks that are innovative and inspirational to adapt to the complexity and constant change in today's healthcare environment
- Transformational leadership, social capital, and change management are critical components for building a culture of innovation within the healthcare system
- Inspired leadership and resiliency are core influencers for nurse leaders

SYSTEMS-LEVEL CONCEPTS

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is the process of transforming both individuals and systems due to the commitment, energy, vision, and inspiration of dynamic leadership. Modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart are practices of transformational leaders that foster innovation.³ At the core is a belief that leaders have the power needed to transform a low-performing organization into a high-performing organization. Through effective communication, dedi-

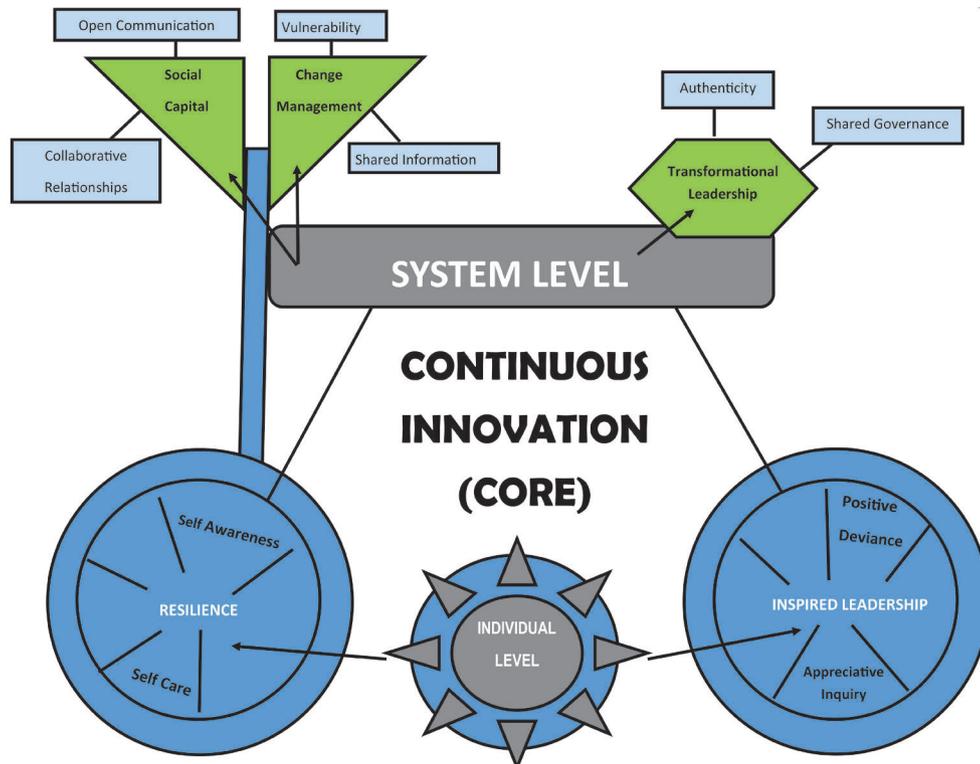


Figure 1. The Continuous Innovation Model (CIM)

cated team members are empowered to drive change. Transformational leadership achieves change by evoking responses with authenticity, based on trust, positive relationships, and leading by example. Innovation within a transformational system is finding new ways of thinking, performing, and creating⁴ through shared governance and the power of positivity.

Shared governance can be achieved when members move in and out of leadership roles. This distributed leadership empowers the members of the organization through partnership, equity, accountability, and ownership.⁵ As a result, problem solving arises through spontaneous collaboration, intuitive working relationships, and formal structures. Shared governance nurtures an innovative environment by allowing team members to challenge norms and enabling others to act in alignment with the organization's shared vision.

Social Capital

Social capital is a valuable asset to both organizations and leaders. The benefit is a result of leveraging networks of relationships to achieve positive results. By definition, social capital is the number and strength of connections between individuals and systems.⁶ Social capital breaks down silos, facilitates the flow of information and resources, interconnects networks, and strengthens the intellectual capacity to promote transformation. An extension of social capital leads to collaborative partnerships (CP). CP is a convergence

of skills and resources belonging to both the organization and the individual. This integration allows for completion of common goals that neither side could achieve independently.⁷ These partnerships allow for a broad distribution of tasks, enhance communication, and ensure accountability among team members.⁸ CP improves leader proficiency because they do not simply occur. A strong, insightful leader must first recognize complementary skill sets. Then leaders capitalize on them to build successful teams and cultivate an innovative environment.

Social awareness and open, skilled communication strengthen social capital. Social awareness requires looking outward to learn about and appreciate others.⁹ A socially aware leader recognizes and understands others' emotions through true presence and engaged listening. In addition, open communication accentuates clear expectations, establishes accepted behaviors, and professional standards. Skilled communication improves the flow of information, fosters interconnectedness, and enriches relationships.¹ Communication leverages social capital to build collegial, trusting relationships to transform a culture and promote continuous innovation.

Change Management

The factors affecting the complexity of health care do not in and of themselves bring about innovative change; instead, they create the need for change. According to Crowell,¹ the social system in which inno-

vation takes place is a set of interrelated units that join together to solve problems and work toward solutions with common goals. Structures and process can either significantly facilitate or impede diffusion of innovation. Effectively utilizing change management models supports organizations' interest and acceptance of change. Although necessary, innovators or change agents represent only 2.5% of organizational teams. As a result, change management structure and processes must exist for innovation to pervade a culture.

Change can be difficult, and at times, leaders are met with resistance. Fostering innovation requires trial and error, enthusiasm to try new ideas, and the ability to accept and learn from failure. Vulnerability demonstrates a leader's willingness and acceptance of both personal and organizational growth and imperfection. As a virtue and strength, vulnerability is described as the birthplace of innovation, emotion, and creativity.¹⁰ Demonstrating vulnerability allows collaborative partnerships to flourish through human connection and relationship building. Trust, inspiration and hope can be achieved when the leader is growing alongside team members.

INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL CONCEPTS

Resilience

Resilience refers to an individual's ability to physically and emotionally adapt to a trajectory of healthy functioning in the face of adversity.¹¹ This attribute enables individuals to be refreshed and create new ideas that allow innovation to occur within a complex system. Resilience advances innovation and hope despite challenges, threats, or stress. Self-care, self-awareness, and mindfulness are powerful catalysts to foster resilience. Mindfulness is purposefully paying attention and being present.¹² Mindfulness builds emotional regulation leading to resilience and improved self-care. As a result, stress, anxiety, and depression are reduced, further reducing the risk for acute or chronic fatigue. Self-care involves the preservation and balance of an individual's emotional, social, and physical well-being. It is the ability to identify an individual's emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs, and drive, and recognize how they affect one's self, other people, and relationships.¹³ Emotional intelligence is important and involves self-awareness of personal emotion.¹⁴ The Enneagram of Personality is an assessment tool that can be used to identify personality types and behaviors to understand what motivates team members to be innovative.¹⁵

To build relationships at the individual level, a leader must first take care of his or herself.¹³ A mindful leader generates a creative and focused presence through self-management. A high level of self-management ensures that the mindful leader has the power to take control of difficult situations, react easily to change, and maintain a positive and productive direction.⁹ The significance of resiliency

cannot be underestimated to build necessary relationships for creating a culture of continuous innovation.

Inspired Leadership

Inspired leadership aims to create a culture of continuous innovation by leading others to demonstrate their passion and purpose. Individuals who lead with inspirational motivation impart meaning and challenge to the work while being charismatic, optimistic, and enthusiastic. This "team spirit" engages team members to collectively commit to organizational goals, and also enhance individual self-worth to remain continually motivated. Inspirational leaders encourage staff to be creative in their ideas and logic on a daily basis. These leaders role model the change they desire to see. To create a transformative culture, this leader utilizes strategies to facilitate a working environment that engages people at all levels and empowers them to innovate. Two strategies used by inspirational leaders include appreciative inquiry (AI) and positive deviance.

AI is a philosophy that incorporates a process for engaging people at any and all levels to produce positive, effective change. Further, AI seeks information and fosters change by illuminating the life-giving forces, the positive core, of the organization's existence.¹⁶ AI promotes intellectual stimulation, which is a component of transformational leadership that supports change. For example, AI is a way to embrace organizational change and challenge followers to reexamine their conventional ways of doing things and adopt innovative ways of addressing problems.¹⁷ Leaders using AI promote team development, strategic planning, and improved communication.¹⁸ AI is a refreshingly optimistic approach and intertwines with the defined system and individual concepts in this model. Lastly, positive deviance shifts the focus on discovering and understanding the best practices necessary to change attitudes and spread knowledge. Positive deviance reinforces affirmative behaviors to be replicated and shared for organizational improvement. Implementing positive deviance in work environments is a means to do things differently and achieve a positive learning experience.

CONCLUSION

The cornerstone of a culture of continuous innovation is leadership deeply rooted in knowledge, skills, and attitudes in consort with building relationships. An astute leader has a momentous opportunity to lead by example, strengthen relationships, and enhance imagination to support a culture of continuous innovation. As noted in the CIM model, elements of leadership intertwine throughout the entire structural frame to strengthen both the individual and the system. The leader aligns the various parts. Individuals move cyclically, and the system functions as a universal whole.

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